Roscommon County
Development Plan
2021-2027

Submission on the Draft Roscommon County Development Plan 2021-2027

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Name

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What is the topic of the submission?

Rural Development and Natural Resources, Infrastructure, Transport and Communications, Climate Action, Energy and Environment

Submission

Or

Attached Submission

2021.07.02_Roscommon_County Dev Plan.pdf, 0.35MB

Public Consultation on the Draft Roscommon County Development Plan 2021-2027

Roscommon County Council

Gas Networks Ireland Response

2nd July 2021

Part of ERVIA group

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Introduction

Gas Networks Ireland (GNI) welcomes the opportunity to respond to the Roscommon County Council's public consultation on the Draft Roscommon County Development Plan 2021-2027. Although connections to the gas network are limited in County Roscommon, GNI would like to draw the Council's attention to two initiatives i.e. renewable gas production via anaerobic digestion (AD) and compressed natural gas (CNG) in transport. Both of these initiatives could be of benefit to Roscommon from an economic and environmental perspective.

Consultation Comments

Chapter 5 Rural Development and Natural Resources

GNI welcomes the inclusion of Rural Development Policy Objective 5.3 in Section 5.4 'Agricultural Activity and Diversification'. This policy objective is about supporting and encouraging farm-based renewable energy technologies to help move towards a low-carbon and climate resilient economy in the agriculture, food and forestry sectors. The development of renewable gas production via AD plants in the region would provide significant benefits to the local agriculture sector and strengthen the rural economy. AD plants in rural areas could provide farmers with additional revenue sources e.g. from the sale of feedstocks for the AD plants or from the bio-fertiliser and renewable gas produced by the AD process. The development of renewable gas infrastructure in County Roscommon would support Regional Policy Objective (RPO) 8.7 in the Regional and Spatial Economic Strategy (RSES) for the Northern and Western Region which states "encourage and support innovative partnerships extending the gas network in the region, including the potential for gas to grid injection facilities along with anaerobic digestion facilities." GNI also welcome the inclusion of anaerobic digestion in Section 5.7 Renewable Energy and the fact that the Council pledges to support renewable energy projects in rural areas subject to relevant environmental criteria being assessed.

Chapter 7 Infrastructure, Transport and Communications

Infrastructure is an important enabler of a county's economy and development. The Regional and Spatial Economic Strategy (RSES) for the Northern and Western Region[1] supports the expansion of the gas network into counties within the region as outlined in RPO 8.5 and 8.6 below.

"RPO 8.5: To support the build-out of the gas supply network into Counties Sligo, Roscommon, Donegal and Leitrim and in additional locations in the remainder of the region."

"RPO 8.6: Facilitate the delivery and expansion of natural gas infrastructure throughout the Region and have regard to the location of existing gas infrastructure in assessing potential developments."

The expansion of the gas network within the county could bring competitive advantages to the region, for example, the secure supply of natural gas is in itself an important part of the suite of infrastructure necessary to assist in the improvement of regional accessibility generally.

While it is important to focus on the movement of people in the context of transport, it is also important to consider the movement of goods. Emissions are a key issue to be addressed in transport with

[1] Regional and Spatial Economic Strategy for the Northern and Western Region:https://www.nwra.ie/wp-content/uploads/2020/01/adpoted-rses.pdf

Heavy Goods Vehicles (HGVs) in particular being responsible for a disproportionate amount of transport emissions. They comprised 4% of registered vehicles nationally in 2018, however, SEAI estimates indicate that they produced 14% of total transport emissions. Decarbonisation of HGVs and buses is particularly challenging as electricity is currently not a viable alternative to diesel. CNG is a potential option which delivers reduced transport emissions relative to diesel. When the production of renewable gas is increased on the gas network, and utilised by CNG vehicles as bio-CNG, carbon neutral transport can be achieved. GNI would welcome the inclusion of a section on CNG/gas in transport within Chapter 7 of the County Development Plan. Please see below for some suggested text about CNG for inclusion in the final document.

Compressed Natural Gas (CNG)

CNG is natural gas that has been compressed to fit into a vehicles' tank and is particularly suitable for use in commercial vehicles. The development of CNG Infrastructure will enable fuel switching from diesel to CNG for HGVs, as electricity is currently not a viable alternative to diesel. CNG is an established technology that is used in many countries around the world. CNG produces less carbon emissions than diesel and leads to improved air quality with 99% less particulate matter, 70% less Nitrogen Oxide, and 80% less Sulphur Dioxide. CNG vehicles can be run on 100% renewable gas. This is a renewable and carbon neutral fuel, produced using anaerobic digestion technology from existing waste streams and a variety of sustainable biomass sources, including grass, animal waste, crop residues and food waste. Infrastructure development for CNG is already underway in Ireland, with 14 fast fill CNG stations being installed across the Core TEN-T road network via a project called the Causeway Study[2] that is supported by the European Commission through the CEF Transport Fund[3] and the Commission for Regulation of Utilities (CRU). The development of CNG in transport supports the 'National Policy Framework Alternative Fuels Infrastructure for Transport in Ireland[4]' which sets out a target of 70 CNG fuelling stations by 2025.

Chapter 8 Climate Action, Energy and Environment

In Section 8.5 'Integrating Climate Action into County Roscommon', it is highlighted that in the short to medium term there will need to be a mix of renewable and non-renewable sources of energy to generate electricity in Ireland. The gas network contributes to circa 50% of Ireland's annual electricity generation requirements on average, with peaks of up to 90% on any given day when there is little to no wind energy on the electricity system. The resilience and reliability of the gas network can play a key role in Ireland's transition to a low carbon economy.[5] Ireland must be cognisant of the security of its current energy supply to ensure that the gas and electricity networks continue to service the citizens of Ireland and the Irish economy. The gas network, which supplies gas fired power generators, ensures the reliability of the electricity network when intermittent renewable generation sources such as wind are unavailable.

Climate Action, Energy and Environment Policy Objective 8.3 is about supporting developments and actions that assist in achieving the national targets for energy from renewable energy, from renewable resources and reducing greenhouse gas emissions associated with energy production. With the increase climate action ambition that the Government has set out in its Climate Action Bill, it is imperative that Ireland utilises as many sources of renewable energy as it can. Careful consideration should be given to any investments being made to transition to a low carbon economy

[2] Causeway Study: https://www.gasnetworks.ie/business/natural-gas-in-transport/the-causeway-project/
[3] CEF Transport Fund: https://ec.europa.eu/inea/en/connecting-europe-facility/cef-transport
[4] National Policy Framework Alternative Fuels Infrastructure for Transport in Ireland https://assets.gov.ie/26377/3075c29a37b84b10acae95da89d756ea.PDF
[5] https://www.gasnetworks.ie/corporate/company/our-network/irish-gas-market-overview/#:~:text=Delivering%20natural%20gas%20safely%20and,in%2022%20counties%20around%20Ireland

and funds should be allocated on the basis of the least cost methods of decarbonising to ensure the best value for Ireland. Any technologies being considered should be subject to full life cycle assessments.

Climate Action, Energy and Environment Policy Objective 8.12 is about facilitating renewable energy proposals that bring about a direct socio-economic benefit to the local community. Renewable gas production from anaerobic digestion is a good example of a renewable energy proposal bringing direct socio-economic benefits to a local community. In rural areas there is the potential to produce renewable gas from anaerobic digestion of organic wastes and residues from the agriculture sector with other feedstocks. This gas could be transported by road to a central grid injection point or delivered to significant energy users for onsite consumption. Renewable gas is carbon neutral and identical in function to natural gas so the existing network can be used, and gas customers do not need to change their boilers or gas-powered appliances.

Conclusion

GNI asks that Roscommon County Council considers the above comments and would welcome the opportunity to discuss this response in more detail, at a time that is convenient to the Council.